

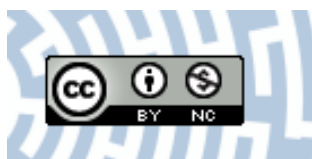


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Title: Signs of mobbing executed on novice teachers

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Signs of Mobbing Executed on Novice Teachers

Abstract

The presented article presents the results of the poll research conducted among novice teachers who experienced mobbing. The mobbing phenomenon in the workplace of various institutions always negatively affects the inter-personal relations as well as the work atmosphere. The research results prove that the most often applied mobbing actions towards novice teachers are the following: impersonal allusions, criticism of the work performed, lowering of professional competences and self-esteem, overburdening with tasks and taking back the previously ordered work. Novices often agree to such a situation and try to wait until it is over or improved, or they try to change the workplace. Despite the unfavourable situation they claim the lobbying they experienced does not influence their educational work with children or teenagers.

Key words: *novice teacher, lobbying, signs of mobbing.*

The requirements imposed on teachers change simultaneously with the social-economic transformations, reform conceptions put forward by the consecutive governments, as well as with the social needs, which in consequence results in additional duties and higher responsibility. Therefore, the teacher cannot be just an expert in the subject he/she teaches; he/she must be an educator as well, which concerns creative thinking, emphatic and sensitive approach towards his/her students' problems and needs.

Competence, creativity and inventiveness are required from teachers in the novelty implementation process, as well as the democratic organization of the class-team mechanism implementation (Grzegorzewska M.K., 2008). Therefore, very

often, the beginning of professional work is perceived by teachers as a frustrating time, which results from the feeling of loneliness, feeling lost, and lack of support from the institution they started to work in. Clash with the school reality, as well as the additional work impediments resulting from the lack of any well-conducted novice worker support system are the two factors not favourable for acclimatization in the new workplace. Novice teachers both burdened with duties and low-paid, frequently have no motivation for creative work, which requires high effort, with pupils who generate more and more educational problems (cf., Kobyłicka E., 2005). Another factor negatively influencing novice teachers' functioning and creativity may be mobbing at school (cf., Gebauer K., 2007).

Mobbing definitely represents pathology in the workplace, which in consequence leads to costs of both people towards whom it is applied, as well as the organization in which it takes place. Mobbing occurs among people who are obliged to be together for a long time. Therefore, the victim of psychical and sometimes even physical violence is somehow exposed to long-lasting contact with the oppressors. Mobbing appears while the victim has no possibility of swift withdrawal from the dependence relationship and as well as no opportunity to prevent the persecution spiral development. This particular kind of conflict is labelled with two international names originating from the English language: previously mentioned *mobbing* and *bullying*. The name mobbing is ubiquitous in many European countries and the USA, however, in Great Britain and Australia the term bullying is used. The word *bully* in the noun form means a coward or tyrant tormenting and abusing a weaker person, and in the verb form it means forcing, threatening, terrorizing or intimidating. And in this case there is no particular group pestering a single individual, and on the other hand, there is one strong person pestering the weaker ones. However, the concept of mobbing functioning in the scientific literature and the European countries' legislation covers both the psychical pressure exerted by the superior towards his subordinate as well as the hostile behaviour of a group towards the individual who is on the same level in the organisational hierarchy or the headship or managerial position.

Since January 2004, the Polish labour code provides the following regulation and the definition of mobbing phenomenon: "mobbing means either an action or behaviour concerning or directed towards a worker, such as persistent and long-lasting harassment and intimidation of the worker, which causes his/her low professional usefulness estimation, humiliation and mocking the worker, as well as isolating or even eliminating the person from the co-workers team". The definition presented in a coherent and precise way presents this phenomenon, the forms

of harassment and persecution of a worker, which may take veiled forms and very often be subjectively perceived by the worker as being bothersome, therefore, it is difficult to discuss this problem with the superior, co-workers or outsiders. The legislator introduced two following objective elements into this definition: frequency and long-time duration. Therefore, only if the humiliation of a worker is frequent and long-lasting it may be treated as mobbing, not as an occasional event (Dąbrowska – Kaczorek, M., Banasik, P., 2004, p. 60).

The crucial feature of mobbing is being a subjective phenomenon, however, it may be verified intra-subjectively – by an outsider not being involved in the mobbing situation. A superior's particular behaviour may be taken as normal by one worker but as harassment, insult towards the dignity or persecution from the point of view of another worker. Various workers' reactions to humiliating behaviour are conditioned by an individual's particular sensitivity, which is shaped by personality, sense of dignity and self-esteem, and moreover, by the primary and secondary socializing processes, bitter childhood experiences and past psychic traumas (Bechowska-Gebhardt, A., Stalewski, T. (2004).

The article presented concerns signs of mobbing applied towards novice teachers, therefore the term mobbing will be understood as a specific kind of conflict which is long-lasting and repetitive, groundless tormenting of the teacher by the headmaster, or other teachers, and in consequence creating a hostile working atmosphere, terrorizing and discrediting all the efforts made by pedagogues, who try to be somehow detached from other co-workers. Hence, these kinds of treatment will cause the victim's low professional usefulness estimation, health problems and finally lead to changing the workplace.

The aim of the research carried out was to define the signs of mobbing actions, which may appear during the first years of the teacher's work. A diagnostic poll method was applied. The research comprised exclusively the teachers who had experienced mobbing at work and who were selected based on interviews, during various kinds of training and workshops organized by professional teacher training centres. The poll questionnaires were handed out personally as well as sent via electronic mail. Effort was made so that the poll was not received or filled in at work but rather after work. Moreover, the respondents were guaranteed full anonymity as well as the results were used exclusively for scientific purposes. However, not everyone appointed to the research expressed the will of participation, which resulted from fear of revealing the fact of participation and research results to the school headmasters.

Characteristics of the researched population

The research was carried out among 97 teachers working at various kinds of schools of the Silesian Agglomeration. The main criteria for the control group selection were: age and job seniority as well as the statement confirming the mobbing actions experienced by the individual.

The group covered 97 researched individuals – 55 females (56.7%) and 42 males (43.3%). The authors' stipulation was to research the individuals who just start their career in the field of education, which explains the young age of the teachers. Hence, the biggest group (53.6%) consisted of 27–28-year-old teachers. Almost a quarter of the sample were 25–26-year-old teachers. Apart from them, there was also a group of 17 individuals aged 29–30.

Among the surveyed teachers, the biggest group was represented by the individuals with the MA/MSc degree (71.1%), and the rest with a higher professional education. The majority of the surveyed, both females (63.6%) and males (66.7%), had been working for 2–3 years in the field of education. One in five surveyed had been working for 4–6 years. The smallest group covered the individuals employed in the 2008/2009 school year. As resulted from the research, 22.7% of the teachers were hired for an indefinite period of time. And more than a half (58.8%) concluded fixed working time contracts, and only in 18 cases it was only a substitution contract.

Such a small number of indefinite period time work contracts may indicate the fact that school headmasters are highly unwilling to sign up the contracts in question with teachers at hand. Even if it concerns the contract teachers, with whom this kind of contract should be entered, it is not obligatory in the case when the headmaster proves the unstable organization of educating. Therefore, the next contract signing may be conditioned by the teacher-headmaster relations.

Mobbing actions predominantly executed on the respondents

The analysis of the research material aims at characterizing the mobbing phenomenon. One of the most crucial features of this phenomenon is mobbing actions, which were divided into 3 categories: actions in the field of destructive communication, dignity violation and work conditions violation. The following chart presents the frequency of the mobbing actions applied within the scope of destructive communication.

Chart 1. Actions in the field of destructive communication

Actions in the field of destructive communication	Sex				Total	
	Female		Male		Number	%
	Number	%	Number	%		
Limitation of one's own statements presentation	9	8.5%	10	12.7%	19	10.3%
Shouting and insult as a reaction to presented remarks	2	1.9%	17	21.5%	19	10.3%
Criticism of the work performed	48	45.3%	15	19.0%	62	33.5%
Insistent phone calls	0	0.0%	10	12.7%	10	5.4%
Threats and menaces	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Various impersonal allusions	47	44.3%	27	34.2%	74	40.0%
Total	106	100.0%	79	100.0%	185	100.0%

Source: own research

In the case of questions concerning mobbing actions, each respondent had the possibility of multiple choice to point out which of the violation was mostly executed towards all the researched individuals.

Among the lobbying actions hampering the communication process, the following ones were pointed at most often: applying various kinds of impersonal allusions (40%), criticism of the work performed (33.5%). The remaining actions which reached the same percentage value (10.3%) are the following: limitation of one's own statement presentation, shouting as a reaction towards presented remarks and insults. Only 10 (5.4%) individuals reported insistent phone calls as an action causing the feeling of being oppressed. No one confirmed any threat or menace applied towards them. Therefore, it can be stated that the mobbing actions in the field of communication in evident acts of verbal aggression have not been applied but more subtle forms. As far as the comparison of the answers given by the females and males is concerned, they were considerably different. The females were much more often exposed to criticism concerning the work performed (45.3%) as well as to various impersonal allusions (44.3%); on the other hand, in the case of the males, the remarks which they made met with shouting and insults (21.5%) and insistent phone calls (12.7%). Therefore it can be concluded that the actions taken in the case of the female and male teachers vary. It can also be stated that in the case of the males, the actions were rather of evident violence compared with

the case of the females, where it was difficult to estimate if a particular action was mobbing or common remark made by head teachers or other teachers.

Next, the question concerning the actions of dignity violation towards the teachers was stated.

Chart 2. Actions in the field of dignity violation.

Actions in the field of dignity violation	Sex				Total	
	Female		Male		Number	%
	Number	%	Number	%		
Gossip spreading	13	9.3%	15	12.7%	28	10.9%
Mocking	22	15.7%	17	14.4%	39	15.1%
Parodying	12	8.6%	12	10.2%	24	9.3%
Attacks on political or religious beliefs	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
Lowering the work engagement estimation	17	12.1%	0	0.0%	17	6.6%
Criticism of decisions	7	5.0%	10	8.5%	17	6.6%
Using nicknames	10	7.1%	12	10.2%	22	8.5%
Backbiting	11	7.9%	15	12.7%	26	10.1%
Lowering of self-esteem and professional competences	47	33.6%	37	31.4%	84	32.6%
Total	140	100.0%	118	100.0%	258	100.0%

Source: own research

The results show that the most frequently listed actions which the teachers were exposed to were the following: lowering of both professional competences and self-esteem – which was mentioned by 84 individuals, and mocking was pointed out by just 15%. Every fourth person mentioned backbiting (10.1%) then gossip spreading (10.9%) and parodying (9.3%). Every fifth teacher is irritated by being nicknamed (8.5%). Just 17 individuals mentioned low assessment of their work engagement as well as questioning the decisions taken (6.6%). On average, each person chose 2–3 of the mentioned actions. And also in this case there is a difference in the mobbing actions applied towards the females and males.

It turns out that the females are exposed to totally different mobbing actions than the males, which might be explained by the fact that women focus on different behaviours than men. However, the behaviour which was mentioned by both females and males at the same percentage level was lowering of both self-esteem

and competences assessment. Only the women pointed lowering of work engagement assessment (12.1%) as a mobbing action. On the other hand, in the case of men, they were more endangered by gossips spreading (1.7%), parodying (10.2%) and backbiting (12.7%).

As the last ones, actions violating work conditions were mentioned.

Chart 3. Actions violating work conditions.

Actions violating work conditions	Sex				Total	
	Female		Male		Number	%
	Number	%	Number	%		
Lack of tasks to perform	1	1.6%	5	7.0%	6	4.5%
Taking back the previously delegated work	21	34.4%	12	16.9%	33	25.0%
Delegating absurd tasks	10	16.4%	17	23.9%	27	20.5%
Delegating tasks far-below the individual's competences	1	1.6%	15	21.1%	16	12.1%
Overburdening with duties	27	44.3%	10	14.1%	37	28.0%
Delegating dignity discrediting tasks	1	1.6%	12	16.9%	13	9.8%
Total	61	100.0%	71	100.0%	132	100.0%

Source: own research

The highest number of individuals mentioned the behaviour aiming at overburdening with duties, which was significantly beyond the teachers' possibility of performing them (28.0%), also taking back previously delegated work (25.5%) as well as delegating absurd tasks. Every sixth person admitted to being susceptible to accept tasks which were far below their skills. A small number concerned dignity discrediting actions (9.8%) and also lack of tasks (4.5%).

Therefore, also in this case it turns out that women and men experience various kinds of actions. While comparing the actions concerning the females and males one can state that the women are more exposed to mobbing by taking back previously ordered work (34.4%) as well as by being overburdened with duties (44.3%). However, in the case of males there is more pestering by being administered tasks which are far below their competences (21.1%) and also fulfilling dignity discrediting tasks (16.9%). The respondents were also asked which of the actions negatively influenced their life. The biggest number of individuals pointed at dignity discrediting (35.8%) as the action they were the most vulnerable to.

Violation of work conditions (30.2%) as well as actions in the sphere of destructive communication (29.2%) also represent the actions by which the teachers were endangered. A very low number of respondents mentioned isolation as influencing them in a negative way and only one individual confirmed all the actions as being destructive.

Comparison of the female and male vulnerability to a particular type of action reveals that a vast majority of females suffer from destructive communication (40.6%) and violation of work conditions (34.4%). On the other hand, the males definitely suffer from dignity discrediting actions (64.3%).

To confirm if the respondents really experienced mobbing one should ask about the duration of the phenomenon in question. While mobbing is defined as a long-lasting action and most of the authors of the papers on this issue claim that to diagnose mobbing it must last at least 6 months; therefore it can be stated that the majority of the researched individuals experienced it exactly in this range of time.

Almost every second person estimated the mobbing time duration as 1–1.5 years (44.3%), every third person estimated this duration as shorter than six months. One fifth of the respondents experienced mobbing for 6 months up to a year. In the remaining cases mobbing did not last longer than 1.5 years.

The research tried also to check in what situations novice teachers experienced mobbing and if this was witnessed or in separation. The mobbing actions applied towards the individuals are mostly unethical and performed in the presence of another people (60.8 %). A low number of people pointed at mobbing actions executed in separation so not being witnessed (39.2%). The analysis of the poll confirms that mobbing towards the novice teachers is executed by the head teachers (46.2%) or by other people in managerial positions (26.9%). Almost a third of the mobbing victims point at the person with long job seniority being the persecutor. Just 3 individuals claimed that their co-workers were the perpetrators of mobbing, and no one confirmed that a short job seniority teacher was a perpetrator of mobbing.

Therefore, based on the results presented, it may be concluded that experienced teachers are afraid of novice teachers and therefore they perceive them as a kind of competition and threat. And in the case of a person in a managerial position, a novice worker may be perceived as an individual who might be harassed or nagged without any consequences of such an action.

As the analysis of the data shows, the most frequent reaction towards mobbing was avoidance of the oppressor (51.4%), next, as pointed by 40 individuals, looking for help, most often in the case of women, only in 9 cases confrontation with the

oppressor took place, and 7 individuals made a complaint to their supervisors. Therefore, it can be stated that the victims of mobbing do not take any counter-measures or fight with their oppressor, they remain passive until the situation changes itself or expect both support and help in problem solving from others.

As the research revealed, a significant number of the teachers (86.6%) negatively perceived their workplace, just two persons claimed they did not perceive the institution they worked in as a hostile environment, and every ninth person could not decide if they had a positive or negative approach to the institution. However, it turns out that regardless of mobbing, most of the teachers can fully realize their duties (61.95%), and just a few (38.1%) are not able to fulfil their obligations fully due to the fact that it is highly inconvenient to work while the persecution takes place. Therefore, the teachers were asked if they would decide to continue working in such an institution. Regardless of the hard work conditions, a significant number of teachers continue working, just 12 individuals left the place in which they experienced harassment from other workers. This might be a result of the crisis in the field of job market, the demographic depression which leads to a low number of classes and therefore limits the demand for qualified teachers, or the fear that in a different workplace there may be a similar or even worse mobbing situation. While mobbing finally aims at excluding the worker from their professional life, the respondents were asked to declare if they intended to leave their current workplace or stay in the institution where mobbing occurred. A meaningful group of teachers want to leave the workplace (41.2%), however, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the teachers do not seek another job institution. 12 people left the workplace and 15 did not even consider this kind of problem solution. Lack of work vacancies available for teachers on the job market, as well as the teachers' hope for solving the problem without changing the institution, might be the reason for the lack of work changing plans.

Based on the carried out research, the following conclusions can be stated: the victims of mobbing may be both females and males, aged between 23–30, with an MA/MSc degree, working on a fixed time contract basis, however, with various time administration, e.g., full-time work or regular post but combined in various institutions. The mobbing time duration ranges from six months to a year. Towards the victims of mobbing mostly unethical actions are executed and in the presence of others. Mobbing can be executed in the following forms: impersonal allusions, criticism of the work performed, lowering of professional competences and self-esteem, overburdening with tasks, taking back the work ordered before. The analysis of the subject literature as well as the research material gathered show that the interior factors causing mobbing are: excessive control of workers with a simultaneous range of not clearly defined tasks, wrong circulation of information

at school, existence of cliques and informal relations influencing decisions taken by the management of a particular institution. On the other hand, the macro-scale reasons might be as follows: law regulations and unemployment. In the field of teaching the mobber is mainly the superior or teacher with long time seniority. The victims of mobbing frequently avoid the oppressor, and sometimes seek help and support from the institution or relatives.

In research the mobbing phenomenon is pictured mainly as a problem concerning the workplace environment quality. And therefore, the macro-systemic solutions seem in this case insufficient and ineffective, while they are connected with the currently up-to-date legal solutions, which prevented the researched teachers from considering taking up any legal steps against the mobbing actions at work. This situation may result from the low legal awareness in society as well as from the past belief that the common citizen in the legal fight with a public institution is bound to fail. Additionally, there is an unwritten tradition that novice teachers should realize their tasks without any possibility of presenting their own opinions or fighting for their rights. And therefore, taking up steps towards mental health promotion in the workplace is such a crucial action. Moreover, since anti-mobbing training and programs can improve the atmosphere in institutions they should be implemented.

The fact worth emphasizing is that mobbing in the field of the education system can be a particularly perilous phenomenon since the consequences affect not only the victims – teachers themselves (e.g., worse mental health condition and lower work satisfaction) but mainly pupils.

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